

The National Rural Development Partnership (NRDP) is a network of established and emerging rural institutions that work together to strengthen rural America. The principal members of the network are State Rural Development Councils in 37 of the 50 states.

Each of the State Councils, which are comprised of active members from a broad range of rural development-related organizations, is served by a full-time executive director. States differ in how they are organized and in the rural issues they decide to address.

This profile is one in a series highlighting the work of the State Councils.

For more information about the National Rural Development Partnership:

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**National Rural
Development
Partnership**

State Profile

The FORVM for Rural Maryland

The FORVM for Rural Maryland was established in 1994 as the state's rural development council by Executive Order of the Governor. The following year, the Maryland Legislature designated it an independent state agency, making it the state's smallest independent agency. As a neutral sounding board for the development and implementation of rural policy, the FORVM is committed to bringing together a diverse group of rural development partners; facilitating the effective use of federal, state, and local resources; conducting policy research and analysis; and sharing ideas and information.

Through working committees and consensus-building coalitions, the FORVM addresses such issues as microenterprise development, telecommunications access, infrastructure availability, health care, and agriculture/natural resource issues and their impact on residents of rural Maryland. The FORVM also recently addressed the complex issue of electric utility deregulation and its impact on rural Marylanders.

FORVM Board members and staff work closely with the Maryland General Assembly



and the Offices of the Governor and Lt. Governor, as well as other state agencies. Recently, the FORVM helped enact a landmark policy initiative, the "One Maryland" legislation, which will provide tax incentives and financial assistance to six rural counties with very high unemployment rates, ultimately strengthening all the rural regional economies in the state.

Contacting the FORVM

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The 36-member FORVM Executive Board represents Maryland's 7 regional districts, non-profit and for-profit organizations, the Governor, the Maryland State Legislature, and state and federal agencies, including:

- ▼ Garrett County Community Action Committee, Inc.
- ▼ Maryland Rural Development Corporation
- ▼ Maryland Aggregates Assoc.
- ▼ Town of LaPlata
- ▼ City of Taneytown
- ▼ Town of New Windsor
- ▼ Maryland Center for Community Development
- ▼ Maryland Department of Agriculture
- ▼ Maryland State Senate
- ▼ Maryland House of Delegates
- ▼ Maryland Municipal League
- ▼ Maryland Assoc. of Counties
- ▼ Maryland Rural Health Assoc.
- ▼ Maryland Farm Bureau
- ▼ Maryland Assoc. of Public Library Administrators
- ▼ Maryland Downtown Development Assoc.
- ▼ MD Assoc. of Community Action Agencies, Inc.
- ▼ Maryland Cooperative Extension
- ▼ Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland
- ▼ Tri-County Council for Western Maryland
- ▼ Resource, Conservation, and Development Councils
- ▼ Delmarva Advisory Council
- ▼ US Department of Agriculture
- ▼ US Department of Housing and Urban Development



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NRDP State Profile

March 2000

The FORVM for Rural Maryland at Work

Solar Energy for Farms

The FORVM is working to install photovoltaic (PV) solar electric systems on farms throughout Maryland. PV systems have an extremely long life expectancy and provide an important source of renewable energy to farmers.

This program allows eligible farmers to purchase a PV system at a significantly discounted price.

Through a Maryland Energy Administration grant, the FORVM can cover over half the cost of an installed system. The Agency is promoting the program and reviewing applications from farmers, while working with a private-sector partner on the installation process.

Microenterprise Development

Maryland's very-small-business sector traditionally has been under-developed and under-supported. In response, the FORVM has targeted microenterprise development as one of its top priorities. In January 1999, the Agency organized a Microenterprise Conference on Maryland's Eastern Shore that featured speakers from national and local organizations, including the U.S. Small Business Administration. This conference soon evolved into a working committee that led to the creation of the Microenterprise Council of Maryland. Steve McHenry, FORVM Executive Director, is serving as the facilitator of this council's Steering Committee and is helping it develop a flexible statewide microenterprise policy.

The Secretary of the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development has asked the Microenterprise Council to recommend how Maryland can best facilitate microenterprise development. In addition, Lt. Governor Kathleen Kennedy Townsend has agreed to provide the Department and the Microenterprise Council with significant new state financial support. By address-

ing the issue of microenterprise development, the FORVM hopes to respond to the high demand in rural Maryland for job opportunities.

Rural Development Funding Initiative

In response to a proposal from FORVM's Executive Board, Executive Director Steve McHenry developed an omnibus rural development funding ini-

tiative for introduction during the 2000 session of the Maryland General Assembly. The "Maryland Agricultural Education and Rural Development Assistance Program Act of 2000" seeks \$743,000 in state funds to be allocated among statewide rural development organizations; statewide agricultural and natural resource education organizations; regional planning and economic development organizations; and regional Resource, Conservation, and Development Councils. The legislation is being sponsored by all of Maryland's rural legislative delegations. The act reflects the collective effort of organizations that serve rural areas to address widespread frustration with inadequate funding sources in those areas.

"The FORVM is a place where all the rural development players can come together to work for our common goal of improving the quality of life in rural Maryland."

**Ken Hafner,
Southern Maryland
RC&D Coordinator**